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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether children view anonymity or non-anonymity in helping as reflecting a greater degree of kindness on the part of the helper. The subjects of the study were 165 kindergarten to college students, primarily white and middle class. Five story pairs containing contrasting helper attributions were presented to the subjects. Three story pairs contrasted intentional vs. accidental, spontaneous vs. solicited, and freely-given vs. bribed helping; two story pairs contrasted anonymity vs. non-anonymity in the case of a recipient and of a peer. Younger children were individually read the story pairs and older children and college students were presented the pairs in booklets. Following the story, all subjects were questioned about which character in the story they thought was kinder. The question about why they felt the selected character was kinder was answered by the younger children in response to all five pairs, and by the older children and college students in response to the two pairs involving anonymous attributions. Results revealed that the view that anonymous helping is kinder than non-anonymous helping appears to be acquired quite late by most children. The justifications for the greater kindness of non-anonymous helping are discussed. Future research is suggested that can investigate differences in justifications in relation to other proposed individual differences in motivations for helping. (BAC)

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Children's Perceptions of Kindness and Anonymity in Others' Helping

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Abstract

Anonymous helping by another was expected to yield kinder evaluations than non-anonymous helping. Story pairs contrasting anonymous and non-anonymous helping, as well as previously studied attributions, were presented to 165 male and female, mostly white, middle class kindergarten - college students. Fourth grade and younger subjects tended to view non-anonymous helping as kinder than anonymous (i.e., an additive principal). While the majority of older subjects viewed anonymous helping as kinder, a substantial minority did not. This suggest stylistic differences in mature persons' views on the virtues of anonymous helping.

The perceived kindness of another's helping is influenced by a variety of helper attributions. For example, adults and older children view intentional as compared to accidental helping and spontaneous as compared to solicited helping as kinder. Younger children often do not take such attributional contrasts into account when evaluating the kindness of another's helping or weight them in the opposite direction (see Eisenberg, 1982, for a review).

The current research concerns anonymity in helping as an attribution influencing one's evaluation of others' kindness. Mature respondents would be expected to view helping as kinder when done anonymously rather than non-anonymously as the former entails no possibility for recipient provided reward or reciprocity. Also, anonymous helping precludes a satisfaction helpers might derive in knowing others might hold them in otherwise higher esteem.

The research was modeled after Baldwin and Baldwin (1970). Five story pairs, each containing attribution for helping contrasts, were presented to kindergarten - college students.* Examples of these story pairs are presented in Table 1. Three of the story pairs contrasted helper attributions previously investigated by the Baldwins (those attributions of each pair expected to lead to "kinder" evaluations by mature individuals are listed first): Intentional vs. Accidental, Spontaneous vs. Solicited, and Freely-given vs. Bribed helping. Two story pairs contrasted helper attributions of anonymity

* *A sixth story pair contrasted characters whose accidental actions may have caused some dismay to a victim even though the characters engaged in successful reparative behavior prior to the victim becoming aware of the accident. This story pair will not be discussed in this report except to say that it was always presented as the last story pair in an otherwise random order.*

and non-anonymity in helping after a helping act had been performed. One involved helpers who did/did not remain anonymous to the recipient of a helping act: Anonymous Recipient vs. Tell Recipient. The other involved helpers who did/did not remain anonymous to peer non-recipients of a helping act: Anonymous Peers vs. Tell Peers.

Method

Subjects

The subjects included 165 kindergarten - college students. The children included all the those available on the testing days in one kindergarten, one second grade, two fourth grade, one sixth grade, and one eighth grade classroom in two schools in a small Washington State suburban school district. The college students were enrolled in an introductory psychology course from a neighboring community college. The sample was mostly white and middle class.

Procedure

Subjects in the kindergarten, second grade, and one fourth grade classroom were individually read the story pairs. This was done either in a secluded area of the classroom or an adjacent hallway. The subjects were told they would hear some stories about two characters ("children") who do something kind or nice and, that after each story, they would be asked which character they thought was kinder (the "who" question). Each subject was also told that there was no right or wrong answers to the questions: that the storyteller was simply interested in what he or she thought. A simple practice story pair contrasting the amount of time two children devoted to helping was then read to the subject. This practice story pair was as follows:

> After a class party two children were asked if they would help clean up the classroom during recess. Ricki helped clean up

for 5 minutes. Gerri helped clean up for 10 minutes. Who was kinder?

With the exception of an elective mute second grader who did not verbally respond to the question, all children answered that "Gerri" or the "one who cleaned up for 10 minutes" was kinder.

The five story pairs contrasting the following helper attributions were then presented in a randomly determined order: Intentional vs. Accidental, Spontaneous vs. Solicited, Freely-given vs. Bribed, Anonymous Recipient vs. Tell Recipient, and Anonymous Peers vs. Tell Peers. Following the child's response to each "who" question, the child was asked why he or she felt the selected character was kinder (the "why" question). As in the Baldwin and Baldwin (1970) study, helping characters in the story pairs presented to female subjects were females while those in the story pairs presented to male subjects were males. The particular helping act - attribution combination within story pairs was randomly determined for each child as was the order of presentation of each attribution. Lastly, pairs of drawings depicting the characters' story behaviors accompanied the story pair presentations. This was done to assist the children in following and remembering the stories and allow the reticent child to respond non-verbally (which was the case for the elective mute child mentioned above).

The other fourth, a sixth, and an eighth grade classroom and the college students were presented the story pairs in a booklet (one story pair per page). They were essentially given the same instructions with the exception that they were to write their answer to the "who" question on the page that the story pair appeared. Also, they were only asked to write answers to "why" questions for the two story pairs involving anonymous attributions.

Results

The frequencies of mature responses to the "who" questions were first compared for the two fourth grade classrooms: one having the story pairs individually read to them and the other reading the story pairs themselves. Chi-square analyses (dfs = 1) yielded no significant differences in the frequency of the responses to the attribution contrasts (ps ranging from >.16 to >.95). The remaining analyses ignored differences in the presentation of story pairs to the two fourth grade classrooms as well as to the younger and older subjects.

Table 2 presents the percentage of mature responses to the "who" question for each of the contrasts at each grade level. This is graphically represented in Figure 1 also. The results for the Intentional vs. Accidental, Spontaneous vs. Solicited, and Freely-given vs. Bribed story pair contrasts were similar to those reported by Baldwin and Baldwin (1970) in the following ways.* Even a significant majority of kindergarten children viewed Intentional helping as kinder than Accidental helping. Also, while kindergarten children did not find Spontaneous or Freely-given help more or less kind than Solicited or Bribed help respectively, by second grade a significant majority of the children were providing the mature responses to these contrasts. Also, with the exception of Intentional vs. Accidental, the only significant increase in mature responses to the contrasts took place between kindergarten and second grade.

*Baldwin and Baldwin (1970) label the three contrasts as "Intentionality" ("Intentional vs. Accidental"), "Obedience" ("Spontaneous vs. Solicited"), and "Bribed" ("Freely-given" vs. Bribed"). Also, the comparisons of the present results to the Baldwins' results is based on the present authors' application of two-tailed binomial tests to data reported by the Baldwins in their Table 2.

Responses to the two anonymity story pair contrasts were quite different. Kindergarten through fourth graders consistently provided mature responses less than 40% of the time. Indeed, in two instances they provided the less mature response significantly more often than chance expectations (Anonymous Recipient vs. Tell Recipient at the second grade and Anonymous Peers vs. Tell Peers at the fourth grade) and the greater frequency of the less mature response approached statistical significance (ps < .16) in three of the remaining four instances (the exception being Anonymous Recipient vs. Tell Recipient at kindergarten). It was between the fourth and sixth grades that a significant increase in mature responses occurred. However, even at the sixth grade the percentage of mature responses to the Anonymity Peers vs. Tell Peers story pair contrast was not significantly above chance expectations. Lastly, while mature responses were clearly predominant by the eighth grade for both anonymity story pair contrasts, a substantial minority (19%) of eighth graders and college students felt that telling a recipient or peers about one's own helping behavior was kinder than not acknowledging such behavior.

Responses to the "why" questions were classified as either noting the target attribution contrast in the story pair or not noting it. ("I don't know" responses and non-responses were not classified. Also, only noting/not noting responses for the data reported in Table 2 are summarized here.) For example, a response to the Spontaneous vs. Solicited story pair that Colleen (see example in Table 1) was kinder because "nobody had to ask her to wash the car" was classified as noting the target contrast. Likewise, a response that Sarah was kinder because "she did what her father asked" was classified as noting the target contrast. However, responses that Colleen was kinder because "she made her mother's car look nice" or

because "she worked very hard" were classified as not noting the contrast. Noting the target contrast was an indication that the subject had recognized the attributional contrasts imbedded in the story pairs.

With one exception, all but the kindergarten children noted the target contrast in their responses 78% or more of the time. (The lone exception was that second graders noted the contrast 60% of the time for the Intentional vs. Accidental story pair.) The kindergartners, however, noted the target contrast from only 8% (Intentional vs. Accidental) to 42% (Freely-given vs. Bribed and Anonymous Peers vs. Tell Peers) of the time. The kindergartners' omission of the contrast in response to the "why" questions appeared to be largely due to their reticence and misinterpretation of the question, not to a failure to recognize the target contrast. This was clearly suggested in their responses to the Intentional vs. Accidental story pair. While 75% of the children provided the mature response to the "who" question, only 8% noted the target contrast in response to the "why" question. Many of their responses to "why" questions were simply restatements of the helping act of the character selected in response to the "who" questions. For example, a child would say that Colleen was kinder for the Spontaneous vs. Solicited story pair because "she washed the car."

Responses to the "why" questions for the two anonymity contrasts provided evidence that it was not a lack of recognition of the target contrasts that lead to the low frequency of mature responses for the kindergarten through fourth grade children. Of those children not providing the mature response, 79% and 81% noted the target contrast for the Anonymous Recipient vs. Tell Recipient and Anonymous Peers vs. Tell Peers story pairs respectively. In fact, these percentages were significantly greater than the

respective 48% (χ^2 (1, N = 88) = 8.64, p <.01) and 61% (χ^2 (1, N = 91) = 4.20, p <.05) of children who noted the target contrast after providing the mature response.

Discussion

The primary purpose of the study was to determine at what point children begin to view anonymity in helping as reflecting a greater a degree of kindness on the part of the helper than non-anonymity in helping. Previously studied helper attributions (Baldwin & Baldwin, 1970) were included in the present study for comparison purposes. As expected, even kindergarten children considered intentional helping as kinder than accidental helping. Second graders additionally viewed spontaneous helping as kinder than solicited helping and freely-given helping as kinder than bribed helping.

The view that anonymous helping is kinder than non-anonymous helping appears to be acquired quite late by most children. It was not until the sixth grade in the present study that the majority of children viewed anonymous helping as kinder. Also, while a significant majority of sixth graders viewed anonymity to the recipient helping as kinder, it was not until the eighth grade that a significant majority of the children viewed anonymity to peer, non-recipients as kinder.

It does not seem to be the case that younger children simply ignore anonymity and non-anonymity when evaluating the kindness of others' helping. Rather, they tend to weight these attributions in the opposite directions as do most older children and adults. Mature subjects tend to discount potential intrinsic characteristics of actors (e.g., their kindness) as motivations for helping when more extrinsically based motivations have some plausibility (e.g., potential reward from recipient and increased esteem from

recipient or peers). This phenomenon, borrowed from the attribution theory of Kelly (1972), is commonly referred to as a "discounting" principle (see, however, Eisenberg, 1986, pp. 67-68).

One account of the younger children's performance is that they were using an "additive" principle when evaluating the relative kindness of anonymous and non-anonymous helpers. Here, the evaluation of another's intrinsically based motivation for a behavior is enhanced by the presence of plausible extrinsic motivations for the behavior. Thus, the children would have tended to view non-anonymous helping kinder because it increases the potential for reward and esteem. While few children in the present study indicated that a non-anonymous helper was kinder because he or she might reap a future, tangible reward, a number of children responded that such a helper was kinder because his or her peers or the recipient of the help would think the helper was "nice" or "kind."

Another possibility for the seemingly additive principle judgements of the younger children is that they found a different kindness or appropriateness inherent in acknowledging one's helping. This was suggested in the "why" responses of some of the younger, and many of the older subjects who selected a non-anonymous helper as kinder. For example, a helper who acknowledged her action to the recipient was judged by a fourth grade female as kinder because "she knew the lady would want to know who fixed it." Also, a helper who acknowledged his action to peers was judged by an eighth grade male as kinder because "if he told his friends then they might help somebody too." Most of the subjects, particularly the older ones, who found the anonymous helper as kinder reasoned that this was so because the helper "didn't expect any reward or thanks" or "did not brag" (examples from an eighth and sixth grader respectively).

The justifications for the greater kindness of non-anonymous helping suggest that a perceived connection between acknowledging one's prosocial behavior and potential subsequent benefits for oneself may be what is late in developing. Also, even when this connection is perceived, some individuals still see a kindness in non-anonymous helping that outweighs the kindness in anonymous helping. Lastly, even when this connection is perceived, some individuals feel that one should at least reap the less tangible, social rewards (e.g., the esteem of others) for their helping and, in the present study, used this to justify their selection of a non-anonymous helper as kinder than an anonymous one. The fact that a substantial minority of the older subjects in the study selected a non-anonymous helper as kinder suggests that there are stylistic differences that are not related to general level of maturity. Future research might seek to further investigate such differences in relation to other proposed individual differences in motivations for helping (e.g., Karylowski's "exocentric" and "endocentric" motivations for altruism; see Karylowski, 1982).

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Table 1

Example Story Pairs for Each Attribution Category

Attribution Contrast	Example Story Pair
Intentional vs. Accidental	Two children do something than ends up helping a young child. *Betty* knew a small child needed the door opened. So she opened the door for the child to walk through. *Carol* didn't know a small child wanted a ball that was on a high shelf. When she put a book on the shelf the ball was knocked down for the child.
Spontaneous vs. Solicited	Two children knew that it was Mothers' Day. *Sarah*, after her father asked her to, washed the windows for her mother. *Collen*, without being asked to, washed her mother's car.
Freely-given vs. Bribed	The mothers of two children would like some help with the housework. *Carl's* mother said that she would take Carl swimming if he swept the floor. Carl swept the floor for his mother. *George's* mother simply asked if George would wash the dishes. George washed the dishes for his mother.
Anonymous Recipient vs. Tell Recipient	Two children do something that helps elderly people who live in their neighborhoods. These elderly people could not have done it for themselves and they couldn't afford to pay someone to do it. *Mike* decided to rake up Mrs. Tait's leaves while she was out doing errands. When Mike had finished he went across the street to his own house. When Mrs. Tait came home she saw that someone had raked up her leaves. Although she didn't know who had done it, Mrs. Tait was very Pleased. *Bob* decided to mow Mrs. Blaine's lawn while she was visiting elsewhere. When Mrs. Blaine returned home Bob walked over and said, "look, I mowed your lawn." Mrs. Blaine was very pleased.
Anonymous Peers vs. Tell Peers	Two children do something that helps an elderly person who lives near them. *Sue* decided to fix Mrs. Dunn's broken gate while Mrs. Dunn was away shopping. When Sue spoke with her friends later that day, she didn't tell them that she fixed the gate for Mrs. Dunn. *Jane* decided to fix Mrs. Hobbs' broken dog house while Mrs. Hobbs was out visiting. When Jane spoke with her friends later that day, she told them that she fixed the dog house for Mrs. Hobbs.

Note: Each story character is introduced in italics. The character underlined for each story pair is the one who would be judged as "kinder" by mature respondents.

Table 2

Percentage of Mature Responses for Each Attribution Contrast at Each Grade Level

Attribution Contrast	Kdg (24)		2nd (22)	4th (48-50)		6th (23-24)	8th (17-20)	Col (18-24)
	Grade and Number of Subjects							
Intentional vs. Accidental	**75**		**77**	**90**		**100**	**95**	**96**
Spontaneous vs. Solicited	46	**	**96**	**96**		**96**	**100**	**100**
Freely-given vs. Bribed	50	*	**86**	**81**		**96**	**94**	**100**
Anonymous Recipient vs. Tell Recipient	38		18	39	**	**78**	**76**	**76**
Anonymous Peers vs. Tell Peers	33		32	**30**	*	56	**76**	**83**

Notes: The first attribution contrast of each pair is the mature response (i.e., that expected to be selected by the mature respondent). The number of subjects responding to an attribution contrast at each grade varies slightly due to some responsdents providing non-contrasting response. Adjacent grade column entries separated by a single and double asterisk differ at the .05 and .01 levels respectively (Chi-squares with dfs = 1). Large typeface entries indicate response percentages that differ significantly ($p < .05$) from chance (.50) expectations (2-tailed binomial tests).

Figure 1

Percentage of Mature Responses at Each Grade Level for Each Attribution Category